Learning Theories- Cultural Historical Thinking as Case Study

Lecture at Vocational Education Teacher Program SU

Lev Semenovich Vygotsky (1896-1934)

Professor Lázaro Moreno Herrera, Department of Education, Stockholm University,

Outline

- Learning theories´landscape
- The cultural historical school
- Vygotsky – The man and his work
- Main categories in Vygotky´s work
- The structure of personality from the perspective of the Cultural Historical School
- Cultural historical thinking extended (*e.g.,reflective practitioner, vocations and contexts, leadership and gender*)
- Concluding remarks- The value of learning theories for reflective practioners

Vygotsky's influences in Nordic educational research

E.g.

- Socio-cultural perspective on learning; contributions from Roger Säljö
- Activity theory, ”learning by expanding”; contributions from Yrjö Engeström

Why focusing on learning theories?

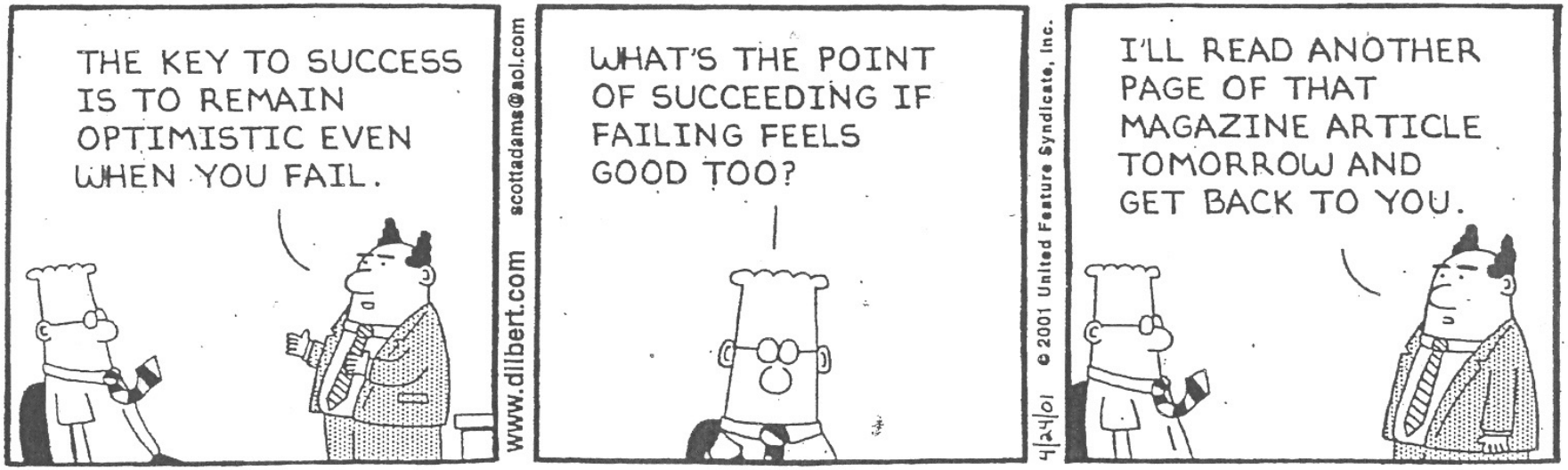
COMPLEXITIES OF THE LEARNING PROCESS AND COMPLEXITIES OF KNOWLEDGE

- Tacit knowledge (Michael Polany)
- Dichotomy, theoretical knowledge vs. Practical knowledge…place for vocational knowledge?
- The challenges of learning processes in different contexts: classroom and work-place
- The need of and strive to have teachers who act as ‘reflective practitioners’

The ”re-discovering of the Wheel”

…very often education has moved through cycles of ideas, only to return, ultimately, to the starting point….a better understanding of education will help avoiding much of what has been called re-discovering of the wheel
(Travers, 1969; cited in Moreno Herrera, 1998, p. 15)

The problem with ready made recipes and "one size fits all"


THE KEY TO SUCCESS IS TO REMAIN OPTIMISTIC EVEN WHEN YOU FAIL.
WHAT'S THE POINT OF SUCCEEDING IF FAILING FEELS GOOD TOO?
I'LL READ ANOTHER PAGE OF THAT MAGAZINE ARTICLE TOMORROW AND GET BACK TO YOU.
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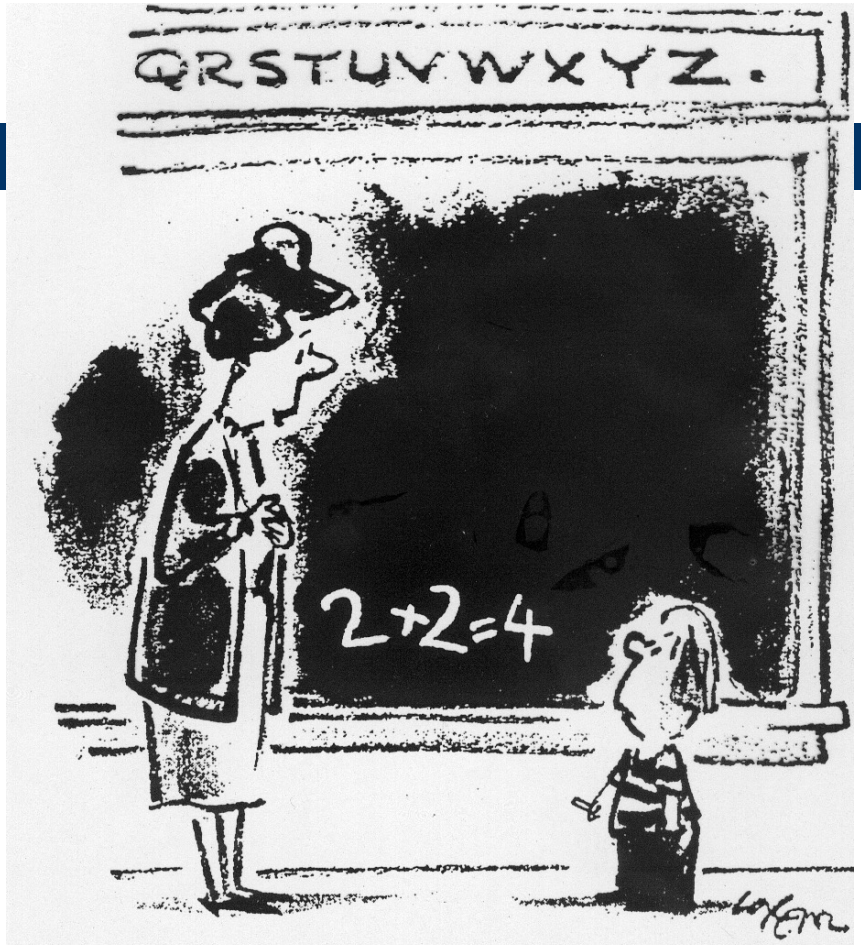
Common language - different meanings

JAG ÄR HUNGRIG! KAN JAG FÅ NÅT GOTT?
VISST! TA SJÄLV!
DU TA ETT ÄPPLE ELLER EN APELSIN I KYLEN!
DIST. BY EUROPA PRESS
TROTS ATT VI BÅDA TALAR SVENSKA, TALAR VI INTE SAMMA SPRÅK!

Learning theories in action



"That is the correct answer, Billy, but I'm afraid you don't win anything for it."

Drawing by Lorenz; © 1986 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

Learning theories in action

The world is understood only from the individual's point of view.

THEORY	MAJOR FOCUS	KEY VARIABLES /CONCEPTS	REPRESENTATVE THEORISTS	PRINCIPAL USEFULNESS FOR TEACHERS
BEHAVIORSIM	Behavior	Stimuli	Watson	***Explain learning of skills and attitudes***
		Reinforsement	Thorndike	***reinforcement***
		Punishment	Skinner	
		Behavior modification		
COGNITIVISM	Knowing	Decision making	Ausbel	***Explain development of understanding (meaning)***
		Cognitive structure	Bruner	***Emphasizes importance of meaningfuness and organization***
		Perception	Gagné	
		Information processes	Piaget	
		Memory	Sternberg	
HUMANISM	The person	Self-concept	Maslow	***Focuses on affective development***
		Self-actualization	Roger	***Emphsizes adjustment and well-beign***
		Self-worth		

Cultural Historical school - Limitations and challenges of language

It should be noted in passing that certain presentations of Vygotsky, particularly some of those in English have been rather unfortunate and in particular have occasioned many misunderstandings.…Be this as it may, there will always remain a further difficulty for readers unable to study the texts of Vygotsky in Russian: in creating and original theoretical system Vygotsky at the same time invented a terminology that was capable of expressing the new approach.
(Ivic, 2000, p. 472)

Mind and Society. The Development of Higher Psychological Processes.

Michael Cole in Preface:

> In putting separated essays together we have taken significant liberties. The reader will encounter not literal translation of Vygotsky, but rather an edited translation of Vygotsky. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. X)

The iron curtain – Two sides

- Impact from political divides: Both sides lacked knowledge on contributions from the other.
- The ‘bridge makers’: Michael Cole, Jim Wertsch, ...lately Yrjö Engeström

Marx and Engels´s works – Theoretical ground and inspiration

- Marx: *Theses on Feuerbach*
- Engel: *Dialectics of Nature*

Vygotsky´s work

…all [his] energy was concentrated on opening up new lines of investigation rather than pursuing any particular line to the fullest. That task remained for Vygotsky´s students and their successors, who adopted his views in varying ways, incorporating them into new lines of research. (Cole & Scribner, 1978, p. 11)

Vygotsky was interested in applying Marxist social theory to individual psychology. The approach he takes to cognitive development is sociocultural, working on the assumption that *'action is mediated and cannot be separated from the milieu in which it is carried out'* (Wertsch, 1991:18)

The Cultural Historical School

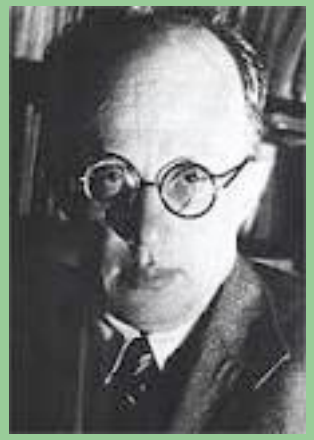
The grounds of the cultural historical theory is in the works of the Russian psychologist Lev Semionovich Vygotsky (1896-1934). After the 1920's Vygotsky, with his collaborators, which included Alexander Romanovich Luria (1902-1977), and Alexei Nikolaivitch Leontiev (1904-1979), and their disciples, worked to develop a revolutionary cultural historical psychology based on the dialectical materialism of Marx and Engels.

The pioneers

Lev S. **Vygotsky** (1896-1934)

Aleksander **Luria**
1902-1977

Alexei N. **Leontiev**
1903-1979



Sergei **Rubinstein**
1889-1960

Evald V. **Ylyenkov** 1924-1979

Lev Semenovich Vygotsky (1896-1934)
”The Mozart of Psychology”

- 1896 -Born in Belarus
- 1917 -Graduated with law degree at Moscow University
- 1917-1924 teaching in different institutions (became a self-taught psychologist)
- 1924 –Starts working at Moscow State University, Institute of Experimental Psychology. Works with Luria and Leontiev; produces his main works
- 1934 – Die from tuberculosis

Interpsychological vs intrapsychological – The process of internalization

Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later on the individual level; first, between people (inter-psychological), and then inside the child (intra-psychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formulation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57)

Main categories in Vygotsky´s work

- Higher and lower mental functions
- The role of language
- Internalization
- Artifacts, signs, tools and mediation
- Psychological tools
- Zone of Proximal Growth
- ”Scaffolding”

Higher and lower mental functions

Vygotsky differentiated between our higher and lower mental functions:

- Lower or elementary mental functions are those functions that are genetically inherited, our natural mental abilities.
- Higher mental functions are those developed through social interaction, being socially or culturally mediated.

Vygotsky´s theory of the role of language

”The initial function of speech is social” (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 74)

STAGE	FUNCTION
Social speech (external) (to age 3)	Controls the behaviour of others; expresses simple thoughts and emotions
Egocentric speech (3 to 7)	Bridge between external and inner speech; serves to control own behaviour but spoken out loud
Inner speech (7 onward)	Self talk; makes possible the direction of our thinking and behaviour; involved in all higher mental functioning

Artifacts, signs, tools and mediation

A most essential difference between sign and tool ...is the different ways that they orient human behavior. The tool´s function is to serve as the conductor of the human influence on the object of activity; it is externally oriented; it must lead to changes in objects. It is a means by which human external activity is aimed at mastering, and triumphing over nature. The sign, on the other hand, changes nothing in the object of a psychological operation. It is a means of internal activity aimed at mastering oneself; the sign is internally oriented. *(Vygotsky, 1978, p. 55)*

Psychological tools

Psychological tools enable to bridge the gap between lower and higher mental functions. Psychological tools include:

"various systems for counting; mnemonic techniques; algebraic symbol systems; works of art; writing; schemes, diagrams, maps, and technical drawings; all sorts of conventional signs, and so on". (Vygotsky, 1982:137, cited in Cole & Wertsch)

Of the psychological tools that mediate our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, language is the most important.

Zone of Proximal Growth (Development)

...is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86)

Scaffolding

”A Vygotskian concept to describe the various types of support that teachers/upbringers need to provide for children if they are to learn” (Lefrancoise, 1997, p. 99)

Alexei Nikolaivitch Leontiev (1904-1979)

- *Activity, Consciousness and Personality*

  In reality the philosophic discovery of Marx consists not in identifying practice with cognition but in recognizing that cognition does not exist outside the life process that in its very nature is a material, practical process. (Leontiev, 2003, p.1)

Individual and *personality*

The notion *personality* is used by us only […] from a certain stage of his development. We do not say, “the personality of the animal” or “the personality of the newborn” [...] features acquired under the influence of social surroundings[...] personality as a product of a cross between the biological and the social factors. (Leontiev, 1978, p. 107)

The Structure of Personality According to Cultural Historical School

Intellectual- Cognitive sphere

Sensations
Perception
Memory
Thought
Imagination

Emotional-volitive sphere

Feelings
Will
Motives

Psychological particularities

Temperament
Character
Capacities

Human being: A bio-psycho-social unit

Embracing the teaching profession and the relevance of learning theories

Cultural historical thinking help expanding understanding of social phenomena (e.g. Leadership & gender bias)

Which learning theory is best for educational practices?

Authored by Professor Lázaro Moreno Herrera, Scientific Leader
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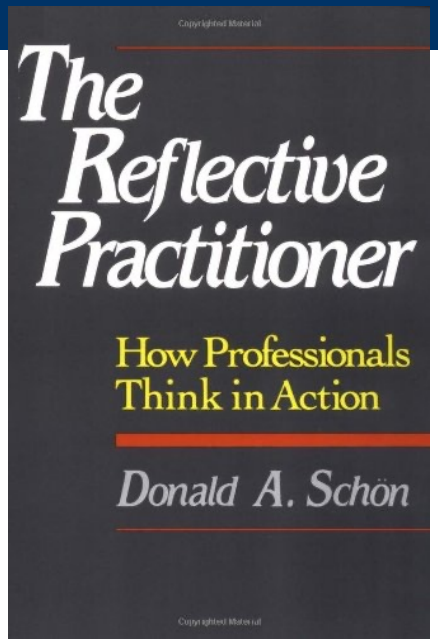
The reflective practioner



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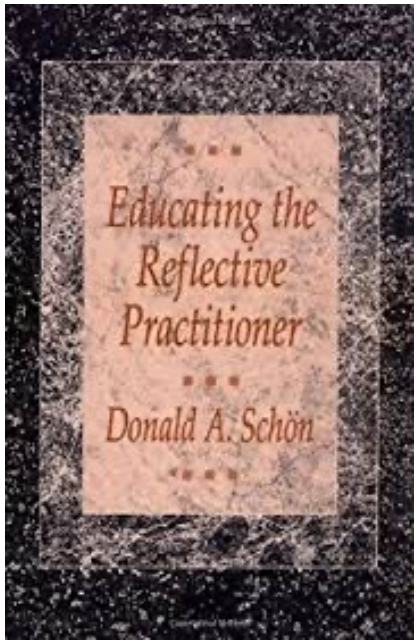

1987

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The reflective practioner

John Dewey (1933) described the difference between:
-impulsive action,
-routine action and
-reflective action.

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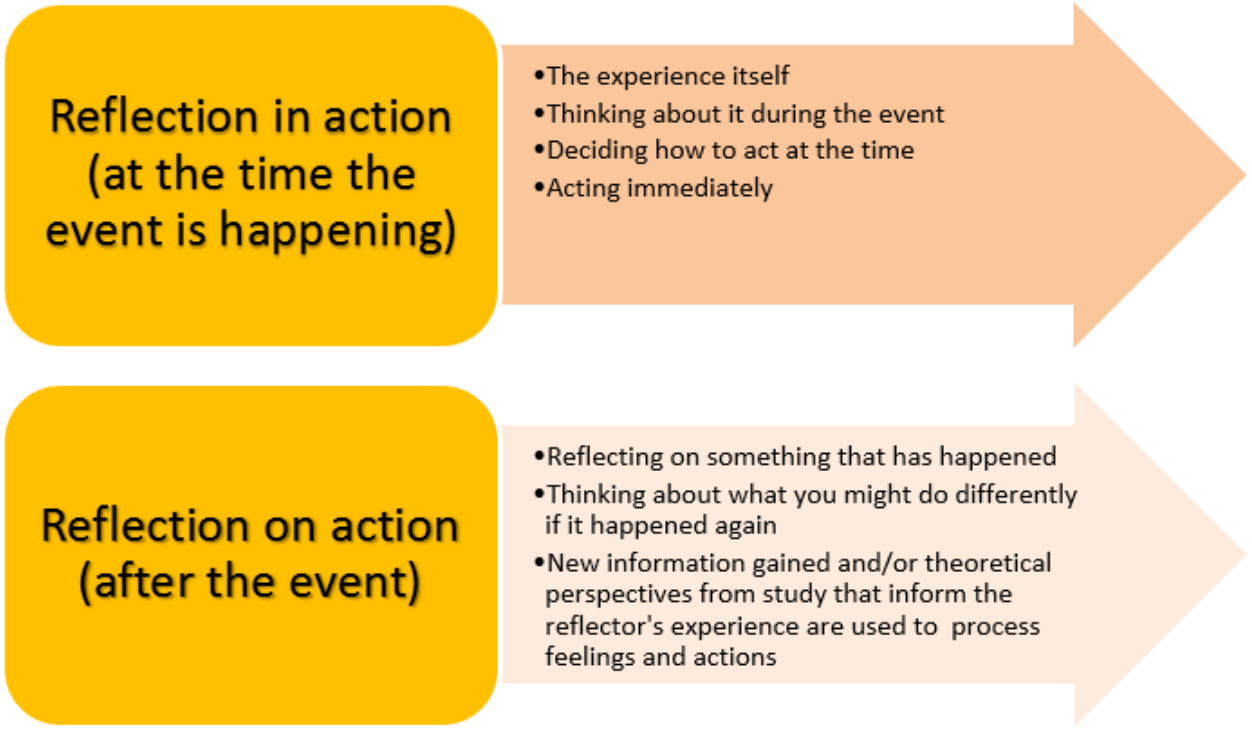
Reflection in action & Reflection on action


Reflection in action (at the time the event is happening)
•The experience itself
•Thinking about it during the event
•Deciding how to act at the time
•Acting immediately
Reflection on action (after the event)
•Reflecting on something that has happened
•Thinking about what you might do differently if it happened again
•New information gained and/or theoretical perspectives from study that inform the reflector's experience are used to process feelings and actions

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What are the benefits of reflective practice?

- Roffey-Barentson and Malthouse (2009)

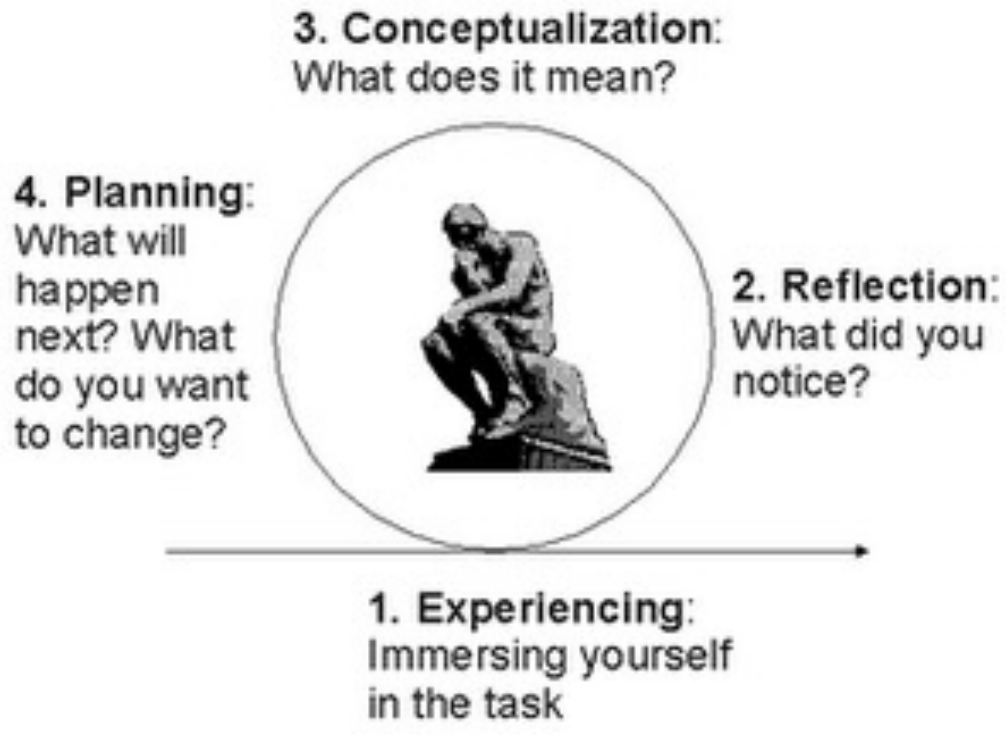
1. Improving your teaching practice

- If you take the time to reflect on your teaching, and reflect on how different parts of what you do work well, where aspects of your teaching can be improved, and how problems which arise could be solved, that is bound to help you to improve your teaching.

2. Learning from reflective practice

- There is a good range of evidence that purposeful reflection helps 'deep' learning take place, and for you as a teacher, it will help you to make connections between different aspects of your teaching and what goes on around your teaching. Reflective practice will help you gain new learning and use it in your teaching.

Process of reflection



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Some principles

- Outcomes depend on teacher quality more than school quality
- Professionals practice in conditions of uncertainty: ‘training’ is not enough
- Teacher practice & thinking interacts with institutional & systemic factors
- Teaching is ethical & political

Thanks!!!.. and best wishes!!

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